

**RHYL CITY STRATEGY
INTERIM EVALUATION REPORT**

April 2007-October 2008



The following report has been prepared by Anne Green of the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick, on behalf of Rhyl City Strategy, with Ali Thomas (Rhyl City Strategy Project Manager). The report assesses the key achievements and the challenges faced in the first eighteen months of the Rhyl City Strategy Pathfinder programme. The report draws on findings from:

- Interviews conducted by the Area Evaluation Advisor, either face-to-face or by phone, with some of the Board members in late spring and early summer 2008.
- A series of eight focus groups, involving over fifty residents in total, held at different community venues in Rhyl, together with comments drawn from over 60 questionnaires distributed by Rhyl Youth Action Group on behalf of Rhyl City Strategy, providing information about the experience of being workless, what makes it difficult to get work, what help unemployed people need, and what a perfect employment service would look like.
- Notes from Employer Engagement Group meetings and associated information submitted by employers about recruitment policies and attitudes to taking on individuals from different workless groups.

Chairman's Foreword

I am very pleased to be able to write this foreword to accompany the interim evaluation report of Rhyl City Strategy.

The Government's City Strategy aims to tackle worklessness in 15 of the most disadvantaged communities across the UK – including Rhyl. The strategy is based on the idea that local partners can deliver more if they combine and align their efforts behind shared priorities, and are given more freedom to try out new ideas and to tailor services in response to local need. In Rhyl we aim to:

- Ensure employment provision is more attuned to the needs of local employers so individuals gain the skills and attributes they need to access the particular jobs that employers need to fill; and
- Play a significant role in increasing local employment rates, ensuring those most disadvantaged in the labour market can receive the help and guidance they need.

Our approach to delivering City Strategy will test:

- How best to combine the work of government agencies, local government and the private and voluntary sectors in a concerted local partnership (consortium) – to provide the support jobless people need to find and progress in work; and
- Whether local stakeholders can deliver more by combining and aligning their efforts behind shared priorities, alongside more freedom to innovate, and tailor services in response to local needs.

Launched in 2006 the City Strategy is already helping to make difference in Rhyl with the number of people out of work decreasing. However, it is clear to me that we must endeavour to build on the achievements of the last 18 months, in particular, we must build on the many productive partnerships that have developed from working with each other in a cohesive and collaborative way to ensure that each and every person who is without work in Rhyl is given the support they need to access meaningful employment.

Barry Mellor

**Chair
Rhyl City Strategy**

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 City Strategy Programme

In 2006 the Department of Work and Pensions announced the introduction of a new programme, City Strategy, which would play a key role in the Government's aim of reaching 80% employment. The programme was aimed at tackling economic inactivity, worklessness and child poverty in the most disadvantaged communities across the UK – many of which are in major cities and other urban areas. The programme was initially scheduled to come to an end in March 2009.

The Strategy is based on the idea that local partners can deliver more if they combine and align their efforts behind shared priorities, and are given more freedom to try out new ideas and to tailor services in response to local need. The successful areas were to test how best to combine the work of government agencies, local government and the private and voluntary sectors in a local partnership to provide the support jobless people need to find and progress in work. A further aim included ensuring provision is more attuned to the needs of local employers so individuals gain the skills they need to access the particular jobs that employers need to fill.

Towns and cities across the UK were invited to submit bids for inclusion in the programme. Rhyl was among fifteen areas in the UK and one of only two areas in Wales granted City Strategy pathfinder status:

- Birmingham, Coventry and the Black Country
- Blackburn
- Dundee
- East London
- Edinburgh
- Glasgow
- Heads of the Valleys
- Leicester
- Manchester
- Merseyside
- Nottingham
- Rhyl
- Sheffield
- Tyne and Wear
- West London

The case for Rhyl's inclusion was clear; Rhyl was a popular and thriving holiday destination up until the 1970s, but the advent of cheap overseas flights and the subsequent decline in traditional British seaside tourism contributed to a decline in the town's fortunes. The 2005 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation ranked two

of Rhyl's wards among the five most deprived areas, and the concentration of worklessness is more prevalent in Rhyl than in many other towns in Wales. Unemployment is above the Welsh average, with the highest levels of economic inactivity concentrated in Rhyl West, Rhyl South West and Rhyl East. In 2006 in Rhyl West alone, 1430 are reported as being workless, 50% of the working age population as reported by the 2001 Census.

Once the pathfinders were selected, DWP provided £5 million seedcorn funding to get plans off the ground, shared equitably between the Pathfinder areas. The successful areas submitted detailed business plans for taking forward their proposals, including proposals for 'enabling measures' – changes to perceived barriers within the benefits system itself.

To support the programme, a quarterly "learning network" forum was established for senior DWP officers and representatives from all 15 pathfinder areas to share information and explore potential solutions to identified barriers. Additionally, DWP commissioned the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick to undertake a national evaluation of City Strategy. The national evaluation is concerned with capturing evidence about processes of change; differences in governance, delivery and performance; outcomes; and transferable lessons. Area Evaluation Advisors were appointed to support the Pathfinders in conducting their own local evaluation activity and to assist in alerting the national evaluation team to emerging evidence.

In July 2008 the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Rt Hon James Purnell MP announced continuation funding for all City Strategy Pathfinders for a further two years up to 2011.

1.2 Business Plan – the Rhyl City Strategy approach

Prior to Rhyl's establishment as a City Strategy Pathfinder, the "Rhyl Unemployment Group" (established in 2002 and chaired by Chris Ruane MP) brought together key stakeholders on a quarterly basis, with the aim of identifying solutions to the issue of persistently high and long-term unemployment in Rhyl West and Rhyl South West. Meetings focussed on improving information-sharing and communication, improving community links with the business community, identifying and addressing barriers preventing the town's unemployed population from accessing local employment opportunities, looking at ways of ensuring the positive impact of regeneration on local skills development, and highlighting barriers within the benefits system itself.

With the City Strategy announcement in 2006, the Rhyl Unemployment Group, now the "City Strategy Consortium", submitted its comprehensive Business Plan to DWP. In the Plan, the Consortium set out its vision for delivering lasting economic and social benefit for Rhyl, tackling a culture of worklessness in the

more deprived areas to convert a large pool of economic inactive people into an economic asset of motivated and skilled individuals working in support of the town's economic revival. This vision included a strategic goal, to increase the employment rate in Rhyl to 67% by 2010, and a strategic approach to reaching that goal in three key phases:

Phase 1 - the initial phase covering mainly short term improvements – focusing on helping people into sustainable employment, and helping people to remain and progress in work, characterised by closer partnership working between key stakeholders; organisations delivering mainstream employment provision, organisations providing training solutions, organisations involved the engagement of people disadvantaged in the labour market, and employers.

Phase 2 – covering medium-term improvements - focusing primarily on influencing the delivery of mainstream programmes through enabling measures, alignment of funding and introducing new interventions supported by Convergence Funding.

Phase 3 - the longer-term aim looking beyond the initial two year programme, with the Rhyl City Strategy Consortium taking full accountability for managing both central and local funds in the design and delivery of a devolved and integrated Welfare to Work Agenda.

The Plan saw the success of this overall approach being dependent on the ability to

- Agree and maintain between partners a shared vision of Rhyl;
- Add value to existing provision and delivery in Rhyl;
- Provide a framework for more effective co-operation between key stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors;
- Engage employers in the decision making process;
- Remove unnecessary competition and duplication of effort;
- Rationalise and co-ordinate programme funds; and
- Agree and introduce 'enabling measures' with DWP.

The Plan sets out a vision for an integrated approach to community engagement through close involvement with the voluntary and community sectors, using community outreach to create key links between community-based programmes and mainstream provision. While the Plan highlights specific target groups (lone parents, older people, people on incapacity benefit and NEETs - young people not in training, education or employment), it adopts a mainly area-based approach, seeking to focus on specific locations that contain the highest

concentration of worklessness, and to reach out to previously excluded people in those communities.

Through engaging with individuals to improve the take up of basic skills, confidence and motivation, and to develop generic work skills and vocational qualifications, a pool of work-ready individuals could be supported to take up the specific job opportunities available within the labour market both current and future.

In support of this vision, the Business Plan stresses the importance of involving employers in the leadership of the City Strategy and in the earliest stages of programme design. It promotes the improvement of employer brokerage through the creation of a single point of contact for recruitment, and the use of work trials to encourage employers to take a chance on disadvantaged clients. It seeks to involve employers in the identification of skills gaps and in the design and delivery of pre-employment training, including custom-built employment and training programmes around their specific hiring requirements and/or sector specific needs.

The Plan also outlines the strategic links that will be made with the key themes of Rhyl Going Forward, Rhyl's regeneration programme; Housing, Healthy Living Communities, Education and Social Inclusion, and Business and Enterprise, and acknowledges the interrelatedness of these themes. The Plan sets out how the City Strategy will seek to develop a range of initiatives to ensure that Rhyl's regeneration is not limited to buildings, but that it also maximises opportunities for social regeneration. This might include increasing referrals from GPs to the Pathways programme, helping employers and individuals to manage mental health in the workplace (employability with health), using housing renewal programmes to provide training opportunities in construction (employability with housing), actively engaging with sole traders to enable them to become employers, actively promoting Test Trading to allow people to retain their benefits during a period of business start-up and encouraging the development of social enterprises (employability and business).

1.3 Structure and Governance

In May 2007, an Executive Board was elected from among the Consortium membership to oversee governance issues. The Board included representatives from the Welsh Assembly Government (DE&T and DCELLs), Llandrillo College Rhyl, North Wales Women's Centre, Clwyd Coast Credit Union, Denbighshire County Council, the Local Health Board, and with senior managers from major local employers Arriva Wales and Clwyd Leisure as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively. In May 2008, additional representatives joined from North Wales Police, North Wales Probation and Careers Wales.

It was initially supposed that Denbighshire County Council might provide governance for the programme, but there were some concerns that elements of the programme could be stymied by the bureaucratic processes of a local authority. The Board therefore proposed that a Community Interest Company be created to provide overall governance and direction for the City Strategy. A formal request to DWP was considered at the highest levels and eventually agreed in early 2008, and the Rhyl City Strategy Community Interest Company was registered with Companies House on 9th April 2008. Clwyd Coast Credit Union provided banking for the programme's allocation of seedcorn funding.

Rhyl City Strategy was formally launched at an event in January 2008, with over 80 invited organisations attending a series of speaker presentations in the United Reform Church Hall, and with a public open day at the neighbouring Town Hall attended by over 300 visitors.

1.4 Project Team

A project team was set up to support the implementation of the Business Plan, comprising a project director, project manager, employer liaison worker, community engagement worker and a part-time administrator. The administrator and employer liaison worker started in April 2007, the former employed by Clwyd Leisure while the latter was seconded from Working Links. The project manager and community engagement worker started in August 2007, employed by Llandrillo College Rhyl. The project director was appointed in January 2008 on a one-day-a-week basis. Denbighshire County Council provided office premises rent-free in Wood Road, West Rhyl, and also provided IT and communications support.

1.5 Key Activities

During the first year of its operation, Rhyl City Strategy has been actively engaged in Phase 1 of its approach, focusing on the development of closer partnership working between organisations delivering mainstream employment provision, organisations providing training solutions, organisations involved in the engagement of people disadvantaged in the labour market, and employers.

In December 2007 the project team organised an "Action Planning" event to bring stakeholders together to map existing provision and highlight key areas for development in line with the aspirations set out in the business plan. The event was attended by over 60 participants, and 'open space' discussions led to a set of proposals for key initiatives and areas of focus.

To take these proposals forward, the City Strategy team has drawn on its contacts with key local stakeholder organisations to develop opportunities for engagement with individuals currently not linking in with mainstream services,

and to look at how to support and promote progression opportunities and routeways. The involvement of less obvious partners, such as Rhyl Football in the Community, has provided opportunities to explore more innovative ways of engaging with the community. Views of individual community members have been sought through a series of consultation exercises and focus group meetings, feedback from which is detailed later on in this report. Sub groups have been formed to look at addressing some of the barriers highlighted through these consultations (childcare, lack of aspiration etc).

In addition to this community focus there has been a parallel strand of work around engagement with employers. Work has taken place on pulling together and rationalising the efforts of key providers to engage with employers, and to ensure that unemployed and economically inactive individuals in Rhyl are well placed to gain from local employment opportunities, such as those created through Rhyl Going Forward. Employers from a number of sectors have worked with City Strategy to design and deliver vocational training pathways; one example was a training programme run in conjunction with a number of local employers from the tourism and leisure industry which led to fifteen individuals gaining life-guarding qualifications and full time employment. The Strategy team have supported employers to develop community based recruitment practices and to take their vacancies out into community venues, including one recruitment fair in the central walkway of the local White Rose shopping centre.

In support of the work around engagement and employability training, in May 2008 contracts were awarded to four organisations to deliver programmes of employment focussed activity through Rhyl's allocation of Deprived Area Funding. The programmes, detailed below, were designed to meet some of the needs identified through earlier consultations, and sought to engage with individuals who are at a disadvantage in the labour market.

- Coleg Llandrillo Rhyl: 6 week pre-employment retail training at a purpose built facility in the "Hub", West Rhyl, providing experience in customer care, cash handling, confidence building, employability skills, and an introduction to shop and counter work, as well as work taster days with local retail stores, information and advice on careers, CV writing and interview skills.
- Rhyl Football in the Community; training twelve individuals to gain a Level One football coaching award (including FAW Football Leaders Award, FAW Goalkeepers Award, FAW First Aid course, and FAW Welfare and Child protection award). The programme covers basic coaching principles, session planning, equipment and resources, communication skills, health and safety issues, diet and nutrition, and football and disability.

- Denbighshire Enterprise Agency; Test Trading scheme offering a chance for individuals to start up in business while remaining in receipt of benefits for the first 13-26 weeks. The package of support includes mentoring, a start-up grant, and regular networking events.
- Princes Trust Cymru 'Get Into Hospitality', a 2 week programme offering young people aged 16-25 a chance to develop employability skills and gain sector specific qualifications. Participants attend workshops on CV writing and interview techniques, meet local employers and receive ongoing mentoring support.

Wherever possible, Rhyl City Strategy has sought to put employability high on the agenda of organisations in the statutory, voluntary and community sectors, looking both at where strategic links can be made and where operations can dovetail to provide links and progression where these opportunities were previously being missed. This work has led to a number of proposed initiatives that are being actively developed by the project team, including a proposal for a "training hotel", an initiative looking at training and employment opportunities linked to the renovation of empty homes, a programme of vocational training routeways in conjunction with local employers, and a community film, based on a local housing estate, providing training opportunities for young people in film and media.

Four detailed case studies are included below to provide an illustration of some of the work being taken forward by the Strategy:

1.6 Case Studies

The Hub

The Rhyl City Strategy Business Plan sets out a vision for a retail training centre to support skills development in one of the town's key sectors. At the same time, Rhyl Youth Action Group (RYAG) was developing its own plans for renovating a rundown listed building next door to its existing premises in Wellington Road, West Rhyl. In return for funding towards the renovation work, Rhyl City Strategy was able to take on a large space to the front of the premises, where it could develop a state-of-the-art "virtual shop" and training centre in the heart of one of its target communities. The centre will be used to deliver retail training to unemployed and economically inactive people; initially six courses annually for up to ninety learners in total, of whom it is envisaged that 60% will progress into work.

The partnership that started with two organisations grew as plans developed. RYAG's vision included the provision of accommodation for young people in need of safe affordable housing. The first floor of the property was converted

into three spacious self-contained flats in a partnership with North Wales Probation. The young people living in the properties would be granted “learning tenancies” which linked their accommodation to training programmes in basic and job specific skills. Further office suites in the rear of the building were to be rented out to advice and support organisations, and a shop-front space was to be taken on by Rhyl Create, a voluntary network of local artists seeking a retail premises. The development is financially supported by a range of partners including the Department of Work and Pensions, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, Denbighshire county Council, the Links Foundation, North Wales Probation and North Wales Police. The “Hub”, due to open at the end of 2008, is a physical embodiment of the partnership working that exists in Rhyl around the employability agenda, with clear links to skills development, mentoring and support, and safe, secure housing.

Test Trading

Rhyl City Strategy’s Business Plan recognises the important role of business and enterprise in the town, and the need to promote and support the development of local businesses. The Plan sets out an aspiration to promote the take up of self employment, particularly at groups under-represented in the self employed sector, as well as actively engaging with sole traders to enable them to take their first step to becoming an employer. In support of these aims, the City Strategy has been developing an Enterprise Rehearsal scheme in partnership with Denbighshire Enterprise Agency and Jobcentre Plus. The Enterprise Agency had identified that a major barrier to people wishing to start up in business was having to coming off benefits before the business had a chance to take off. The Enterprise Rehearsal scheme addresses this by allowing individuals to remain in receipt of benefits for a period of up to six months while they develop and test their business idea. Jobcentre Plus established a mechanism to support the scheme, and a successful bid for Deprived Area Funding meant that additional services could be put in place to address gaps in existing provision, including an initial “Taking the Plunge” session to explore potential business ideas, mentoring and support, a start-up grant, and regular networking events. The result is a complete package of support for unemployed individuals wishing to start up in business. The first year aims to see twenty individuals start their own business through the Rhyl Enterprise Rehearsal Scheme, with fifteen of these leaving benefits to enter self-employment at the end of the Enterprise Rehearsal period.

Stakeholder Engagement

Research prior to advent of Rhyl City Strategy by Professor Lloyd and Patrick Berry (which led to the publication of *Rhyl Going Forward*) identified that one of the most powerful issues emerging from their consultation was that the system of governance in the town was more of a barrier to progress than facilitator. Specifically it identified:

- A lack of collective and agreed vision;
- A lack of effective consultation;
- Power struggles working against people;
- A culture of blame with failures and frustrations being experienced by the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Against this background, Rhyl City Strategy has sought to make stakeholder engagement the cornerstone of its approach to tackling worklessness in Rhyl. Stakeholders from the business, statutory, voluntary and community sectors have been closely involved in all stages of the Strategy's development and delivery, with a high level of buy-in to a shared vision. Representatives from over 50 organisations are involved both at strategic and at operational level through City Strategy Consortium and Executive Board meetings, through participation in working groups taking forward identified issues, as well as in project development and delivery. Over 80 individuals were involved in the action planning day (mentioned above) in the Strategy's first year of operation, where a mapping exercise and open space discussions invited views, opinions and solutions and identified key areas for development. Ensuring that the business and community sectors are closely involved in the ongoing development and delivery of the programme is highlighted as critical to the success of the City Strategy in Rhyl. Examples of where this is working include:

- Senior Managers of local companies Arriva Wales and Clwyd Leisure are Directors of the Rhyl City Strategy Community Interest Company
- Links with Rhyl Football in the Community led to a series of community outreach events, using football tournaments to take job advice and support into the most disadvantaged communities in Rhyl
- Local employers are supporting the design and delivery of employability training events through identifying key areas of skills requirements and guaranteeing job interviews to course completers.

Community Interest Company

The creation of a Community Interest Company provided an innovative solution to the issue of governance for Rhyl City Strategy. The Strategy's Executive Board benefited from the knowledge, expertise and commitment of key stakeholders from the business, statutory, voluntary and community sectors. However, concerning the issue of lead accountability for the programme, there were concerns that creativity and innovation would be stifled if governance was provided by the local authority. Denbighshire County Council was itself a supportive and enthusiastic partner of the Strategy, and did not wish the Strategy to be mired in the inevitable bureaucratic processes associated with local government; at the time of City Strategy's establishment, the Council's ongoing

Single Status review meant there was a moratorium on new staff posts. An association of local businesses, Rhyl Business Group, had formed as a Community Interest Company in 2005; the expertise and experience of the Group's Chair and Vice-Chair (also Vice-Chair and Chair respectively of the City Strategy Executive Board) lent strength to the idea of establishing a Community Interest Company (CIC) to provide governance for the City Strategy. The CIC would be an accountable and independent legal entity that would enable a responsive and creative vehicle for decision-making and programme delivery. This was felt to be particularly important given the short timescales in which the Strategy had to deliver its targets. After some consideration, the Department of Work and Pensions agreed to recognise the Rhyl City Strategy Community Interest Company as the accountable body for the City Strategy. The Company was officially registered with Companies House on 9th April 2008.

2. EVALUATING SUCCESS

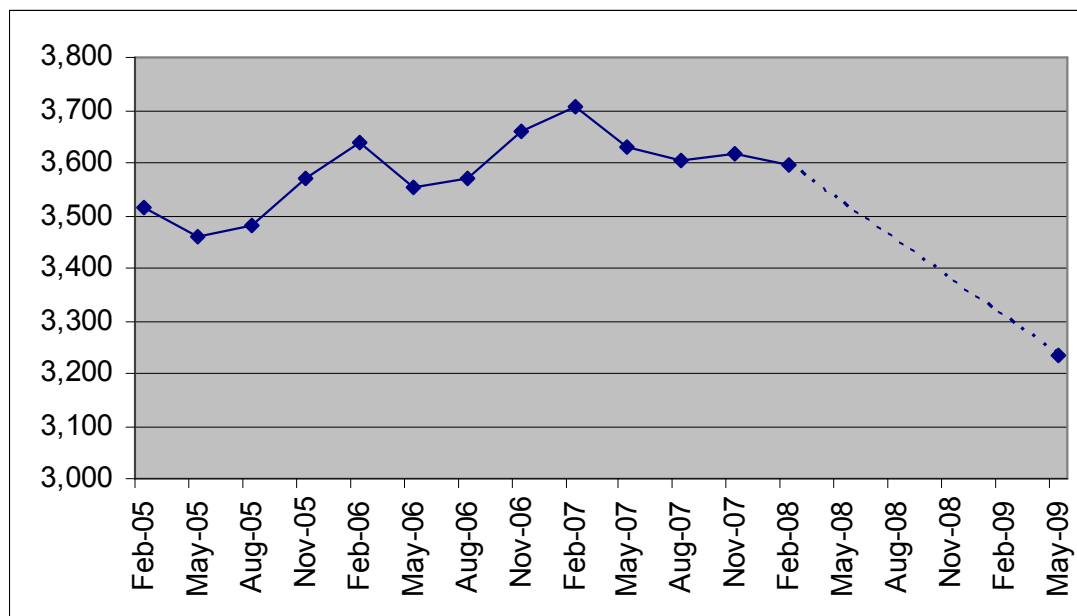
2.1 Contextual and methodological issues

It is easiest to evaluate success when an intervention is simple and has a single goal. City Strategy is a complex initiative with multiple goals. It involves different stakeholders and organisations working in partnership to *change processes* in procuring and delivering employability services and *improve performance*. Many of these changes in behaviour and associated improvements are difficult to measure in simple terms. Moreover, alongside Rhyl City Strategy other policy initiatives and external factors are impacting on outcomes in Rhyl. This means that it is difficult to attribute directly the changes that are occurring to the activities and partnership working initiated by the Rhyl City Strategy Pathfinder.

Typically measurable targets are set for interventions designed to tackle worklessness. Reference has been made above to the objective of increasing the employment rate. In the case of City Strategy the DWP has set targets for each of the City Strategy Pathfinders relating to reductions in benefit claimant levels to be achieved by the end of the initial Pathfinder period in 2009. For each of three key benefits - Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support for Lone Parents (ISLP) – the DWP produced an estimate of the 'counter-factual' (i.e. the level of benefit claims that would have occurred in the absence of the City Strategy initiative). These estimates were made by extrapolating recent historical trends in each of the three benefit types to May 2009 and then summing the forecast levels of benefit claimants into a total benefit number. Having created an estimate of the expected level of benefit in May 2009 in the absence of City Strategy, a target for each City Strategy Pathfinder was then calculated that would, if achieved, produce a three per cent reduction in benefit levels below the counterfactual level that would have occurred in the absence of City Strategy.

In the case of Rhyl the DWP calculations were based on a count of 3,590 across all three benefits in August 2006 and a forecast of 3,336 for May 2009, yielding a **target of 3,236** in May 2009. *Figure 1* shows the trend in the combined benefit count in Rhyl from February 2005 until the latest available observation in February 2008, together with the reduction required to meet the target at the end of the period. It should be noted that benefit levels in Rhyl were on an upward trend at the time the target was set by the DWP (whereas in most other City Strategy Pathfinder areas there was either a downward trend or a less marked upward trend). This means that the benefit reduction target is particularly challenging in Rhyl vis-à-vis most of the other City Strategy Pathfinder areas.

Figure 1:
Benefit trend and target for the Rhyl City Strategy Pathfinder area

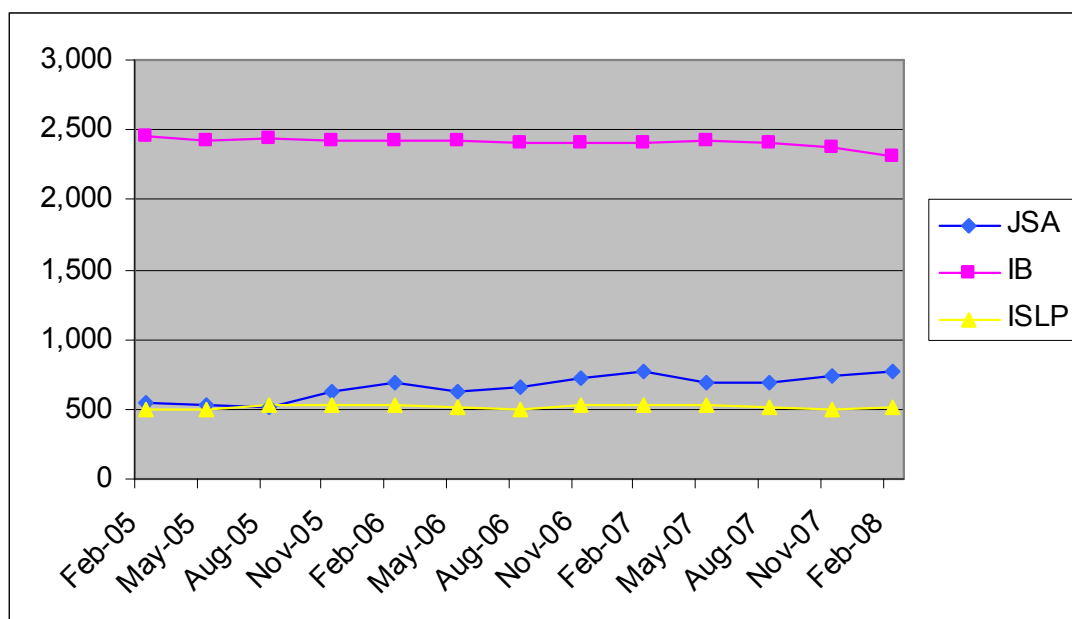


Note: The benefit trend is the sum of working age claimants on JSA, IB and ISLP.

Source: DWP Administrative Benefit Records, obtained via Nomis.

Figure 2 shows trends in each of the three benefits over the period to February 2008 (the latest date for which data on all three benefits were available at the time of writing). Individuals on IB constitute the largest single group of claimants, while the greatest fluctuations in numbers on benefits are recorded for JSA. The chart shows a small decline in the number of IB claimants since May 2007, while the ISLP numbers remain relatively static. The chart shows an upward trend in JSA claimants.

Figure 2:
Trends in three key benefits for the Rhyl City Strategy Pathfinder area



Source: DWP Administrative Benefit Records, obtained via Nomis.

It is important to note that changes in benefit levels over time *might* be attributable to the activities of Rhyl City Strategy, although they might also reflect changes in the wider economy or the impact of other policies operating in the area. Hence, improvements cannot all be attributed to Rhyl City Strategy activities, while a lack of progress towards the targets does *not* mean that Rhyl City Strategy activities are necessarily ineffective.

While some of the Board members interviewed considered that meeting the benefit reduction targets was one measure of ‘success’, others considered that the targets were “not fit for purpose”. While some Board members interviewed in late Spring and early Summer 2008 highlighted the importance of achieving the targets, in overall terms (on the basis of the responses obtained) the targets emerged as of “secondary” importance, with “better processes” and “better ways of working” being identified as the primary means by which they would judge the success of Rhyl City Strategy. It was contended that “working together” was “more important” than the targets since City Strategy was about “collaborative working”. When asked what ‘success’ would look like, features mentioned by the Board members included:

“Improved community morale”

“Increased confidence in Rhyl”

“Regeneration of Rhyl – socially and economically, as well as physically”

“Better attainment”

“Ambitious people connecting to employment”

“Successful mainstreaming of projects” in order that “gains and improvements can be taken forward”.

These responses illustrate the importance of ‘soft’ as well as ‘hard outcomes’ in evaluating the success of City Strategy. Clearly, ‘success’ is multi-faceted and Board members have recognised the importance of ‘collaborative working’ to achieve ‘process change’. Some Board members considered that ‘improving ways of working’ would be easier to achieve than the benefit reduction targets. However, many of the ‘soft’ factors identified above are difficult to measure, whereas changes in benefit levels are measurable – albeit that these changes are influenced by factors outside the control of Rhyl City Strategy, as well as by City Strategy Pathfinder activities and interventions. Hence, the challenge for Rhyl City Strategy to measure and evaluate its success remains.

3. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS – WHAT IS WORKING?

3.1 Ownership / shared vision

Board members interviewed reported that there was significant “buy-in” to the objectives of Rhyl City Strategy. They spoke about their own and others’ “enthusiasm” and “commitment” to the vision set out in the Business Plan. They have demonstrated this through their actions in support of Rhyl City Strategy core values and activities. Board and Consortium meetings have been well attended to date and from the Board members interviewed there was a clear view that “we are all in this together”.

The Rhyl City Strategy Pathfinder has been active in promoting the Rhyl City Strategy ‘brand’ both internally (within the Consortium) and externally (in Rhyl and beyond). This approach stands in contrast to that adopted by many other City Strategy Pathfinders but seems to have been helpful in fostering ownership of, and commitment to, the Rhyl City Strategy vision. The Board may wish to consider the desirability and scope for further branding to raise the profile of Rhyl City Strategy.

One caveat to the ‘shared vision’ is the lack of agreement concerning how to deal with employer engagement. This is an issue that the Rhyl City Strategy staff team has convened discussions on, but no clear agreed way forward has emerged to date. It is recognised that the current practice of multiple approaches made to employers by different partners presents difficulties and is counter to the Rhyl City Strategy ethos of collaborative working and the objective of streamlining and enhancing the effectiveness of employer engagement. Addressing the prevailing primacy of individual organisational interests regarding

employer engagement remains a challenge for Rhyl City Strategy. This is despite the successes of members of the Rhyl City Strategy staff team in brokering agreements with existing and new employers to consider recruiting from workless Rhyl residents for work placements, interviews, etc.

3.2 Partnership working

The City Strategy Business Plan makes reference to a history in Rhyl of a lack of collective and agreed vision, a lack of effective consultation and power struggles. On the basis of interviews with some Board members there is a diversity of views about the previous situation and the importance of what had happened previously for current arrangements. References were made to “previous ‘in fighting’ and ‘back biting’”, the fact that previously there were “too many groups” and that partnership working had tended to be characterised by “froth” rather than “substance”. However, Board members were adamant that what mattered was focusing on what is happening now.

It is clear that Rhyl City Strategy has helped partnership working. Interviews with Board members revealed that many individuals see themselves as having an important role as a ‘conduit’ in brokering relationships between individuals and agencies in the area. Several highlighted that involvement in partnership working under the auspices of Rhyl City Strategy had been beneficial for themselves personally, as well as for their organisations, by bringing, in the words of one Board member, a “whole address book of new contacts” for work in the local area more generally. Engagement in Rhyl City Strategy had enhanced their awareness and appreciation of the activities of other organisations and so had helped them in performing their own roles more effectively.

Although the benefits of partnership working extended beyond City Strategy Pathfinder activity, the central role of Rhyl City Strategy, and especially of the project team, in fostering partnership working was recognised. The “independence” and “lack of organisational baggage” of Rhyl City Strategy has been crucial in enabling the staff team to act as a “lubricant” in an “honest broker” capacity in engaging communities, organisations and employers. The importance of the support of the local MP and Assembly Member was acknowledged by Board members also.

Rhyl City Strategy appears to be playing an important role as a “hub of support” for partners in Rhyl and has been active in bringing people together and inviting ideas from local people. This is in accordance with the ‘bottom up’ thrust of Rhyl City Strategy. The progress made with partnership working has been recognised by community groups; as one interviewee noted: “Rhyl City Strategy look to be doing okay. They’re pulling things together, linking people up. It seems like if they’re going to do something they do it. The staff seem good. Partnership working is vital. Working together can make a difference.”

Despite the overwhelmingly positive reports of partnership working, it is evident that challenges remain. While several Board members reported that there were "no barriers to partnership working", noting that it was "in line" with general trends in the public sector more generally, as "minds are set to work with other agencies", some others, particularly from third sector organisations, raised concerns about the time that it took up. This poses a challenge going forward as it is important that the partnership remains inclusive of a full range of organisations in Rhyl.

While Board members considered that most key organisations were active members of the Partnership, concerns were raised in interviews about absence of a health sector representative at a strategic level, although the situation has improved recently. Some Board members also suggested that "protectionism around organisational identity" presents a challenge because of the associated primacy of organisational targets. It was recognised that a lack of integration of targets across organisations compounds tensions of partnership working.

3.3 Resource

Having a dedicated full-time staff team resource and a very experienced and well networked City Strategy Director were identified by Board members as "central" to the impact and activities of Rhyl City Strategy. The presence of a "new" and "central dedicated resource" was valued and considered fundamental to the progress made by Rhyl City Strategy to date.

It is clear that departure of members of the project team would leave a significant gap in Rhyl City Strategy capacity and activity. The staff team provides an important "presence" and was seen as "facilitating a 'can do' culture", which contributes to the "impetus" of Rhyl City Strategy. Having this resource was viewed by Board members as "essential" in helping partnership working achieve its potential - something that, in one respondent's view, previous partnership working had not achieved. This central resource is 'value adding' - helping other organisations to 'work smarter'.

3.4 Local control

The City Strategy initiative is intended to combat the issues of worklessness and poverty in urban areas by empowering local institutions to develop local solutions. It represents a wider Government commitment to reform the welfare system so that power is devolved to the local level. However, there are tensions between 'central direction' and 'local flexibility' and for the Board members interviewed the lack of enabling measures (i.e. the "lack of flexibility to break rules") had been a disappointment. The general sentiment was: "We were led to believe that there would be flexibilities within the national programme. ... The DWP are going back on what they said."

Nevertheless, amongst local organisations and Board members alike there is a sense that Rhyl City Strategy has marked a “change in approach” to tackling worklessness and regeneration in Rhyl. Whereas the Communities First programme was characterised as “residents having something done to them”, the Rhyl City Strategy approach was one of “asking people what they want to achieve, rather than telling them what to do” (i.e. a ‘bottom up’ approach). Feedback from community focus groups and interviews with local people and organisations indicates that this ‘listening’ and ‘consultative’ approach has been welcomed.

3.5 Employability on the agenda

Amongst all Board Members interviewed there was agreement that Rhyl City Strategy had moved worklessness up the agenda of priority issues and had enhanced networking with regard to employability at organisational and partnership level. As such, Rhyl City Strategy has added momentum to existing activity and generated new activity, so helping to raise the profile of employability. Community involvement in the Action Planning Day, the Rhyl City Strategy launch event, jobs fairs, training events and consultation activities suggest that Rhyl City Strategy has helped to raise the profile of employability more widely, but it is difficult to provide a direct measure of this other than through numbers of attendees at events.

It is evident from some of the interviews with residents and organisations in Rhyl that bringing new jobs into the area is one key element in raising the profile of employability in Rhyl. As one interviewee remarked: “New developments need to be businesses as well as residential.” This highlights the importance not only of initiatives to equip local people to compete effectively for any new jobs in the area, but also highlights the salience of the ‘visibility’ of new developments, and of activities and interventions in helping to raise the profile of employability in Rhyl.

3.6 Early successes

All of the Board members interviewed were pleased with the progress made to date. Rhyl City Strategy has developed closer partnership working between key stakeholders; organisations delivering mainstream employment provision, organisations providing training solutions, organisations involved in engagement of people disadvantaged in the labour market, and employers, as set out in the initial phase of the Business Plan. In so doing Rhyl City Strategy has engendered a new feeling of “confidence”. Organisations have played an active role in many aspects of delivery; as outlined in the Case Studies above.

Much of this success to date is “intangible”, although some service users had accessed new opportunities and had entered and stayed in employment. Work

has begun also on influencing the delivery of mainstream programmes, on the alignment of funding and on seeking Convergence Funding to support new interventions. Looking forward the challenge is to sustain, build on and move forward from the existing platform in increasingly challenging economic circumstances.

4. CHALLENGES: WHAT HAS PRESENTED DIFFICULTIES?

There are external and internal challenges to the success of Rhyl CSP. A key external challenge is the national economic downturn.

The main focus in this section is on internal challenges. Some of the challenges noted here were identified by employers, while others were identified by local organisations and residents. In order to address these challenges it is important to work with both employers and residents.

4.1 Lack of belief in new jobs

The availability of jobs and the recruitment of workless people into those jobs are critical if the aims of increasing the employment rate and reducing benefit counts are to be achieved. Interviews with local residents suggest that in some quarters there is a belief that because unemployment is high there are no jobs. In this context, one individual reported the results of an experiment involving phoning around to find out whether a lack of jobs was such a barrier to employment: “I got six jobs in one day. The problem is you get more on the dole.” Issues relating to the operation of the benefit systems as a barrier to obtaining employment and low pay are discussed below; the key point here is that there are jobs available. But whether there are sufficient jobs and the right kind of jobs to encourage individuals who are currently workless to enter and sustain employment, and whether employers will recruit workless people to fill those jobs and those who are currently out of work believe this to be the case, are key questions.

A belief that there is a lack of jobs to address the scale of the worklessness problem is encapsulated by the remark of one interviewee that: “We will never be able to create enough jobs for all the people of West Rhyl. There are just so many people here who are unskilled, unqualified and have support needs.” It follows from this statement that there is a perceived need for more jobs. Several interviewees considered that Rhyl was well placed to attract new jobs, given its location close to the A55 and so its proximity to the major urban centres of North-West England and on a major route to Ireland. Some Board members spoke about the way that ongoing physical regeneration projects had helped in providing a belief that there were new jobs in Rhyl.

In order to maximise the pool of jobs available to Rhyl residents there is also an issue about encouraging people to look outside Rhyl for employment. In interviews with community organisations reference was made to the reluctance of many young people to look outside of their home town to find a job. In part this localised outlook was blamed on the influence of parents on young people's attitudes. Hence there is scope for encouraging residents to broaden their geographical horizons and consider opportunities beyond Rhyl.

From interviews conducted with residents and community organisations it is clear that there is a fairly widespread belief that many of the jobs that are available are not of sufficient quality to encourage people to come off benefits. One reported that there were "loads of dead end jobs offering £10 per day cash in hand allowing people to still claim benefits." In some quarters it was considered difficult for young people to access such jobs: "Even the part-time jobs like newspaper rounds or chippy jobs which young people could take to earn a little and learn about work are now taken by adults on benefits needing the money."

It is evident that there is a belief in some quarters that where jobs are available they may not go to local residents. There are some deep-seated issues here and past instances of postcode discrimination were cited in community interviews and focus groups, including an example dating from 1982 when 500 jobs became available at a local holiday camp but none went to people on a particular estate in Rhyl. In summer 2008 there were reports of difficulties in finding work placements for young people on particular projects when it is known that they are likely to come from West or South West Rhyl, on the basis of the reported attitude of some employers that "We can employ East Europeans who turn up on time and don't steal from us." Tackling prejudice and stigma remains a live issue.

Clearly not all employers take this view. However, the issue of how recruitment processes work and understanding employers' requirements is crucial if workless individuals are to gain access to employment. 'Word of mouth' recruitment might be the channel favoured and generally used in many quarters, but successes were reported in arrangements brokered by Working Links where employers gave interviews to job ready candidates. Likewise there are examples of companies recruiting disadvantaged people with some success, and adopting a policy of 'growing' their own staff and promoting from within. From focus groups with employers a preference was apparent for recruitment of people who they had already had for work experience. Obviously, such people were a 'known quantity' and it was also felt that they had a "greater sense of reality" about what work involved. This suggests that promoting and securing work placements needs to be a continuing and important part of activities to promote employability in Rhyl.

From community focus groups and interviews it is evident that there is a belief amongst some workless people that they are unlikely to be able to compete successfully for available jobs. References were made to competition from other groups – for example, “immigrants taking jobs”. Even if they would be in a position to get a job, some of the residents interviewed said that they were fearful of “employers going bankrupt or closing down”, so increasing anxiety about going into work. Whether or not there is objective evidence to support these beliefs they are important, because individuals act in accordance with their perceptions.

4.2 Lack of aspiration

One of the key aims of Rhyl City Strategy is to change residents’ perceptions of their own and Rhyl’s future. The Business Plan identified a “culture of worklessness” in the area and a “lack of aspiration” on the part of some residents poses a key challenge to deriving positive outcomes.

Lack of confidence emerges as a key theme from focus groups and interviews with local residents. This may be in general, or in regard to specific activities - such as “interviews” or “being on the phone”. It is also apparent in accounts of individuals who have made a step forward, then feel demotivated if things go wrong. This underlines the importance of building confidence as an element in interventions to help many workless people gain and sustain employment. It was reported that “Get Into” courses from the Prince’s Trust have had good results in helping to build confidence so that participants can enter employment.

Some residents in focus groups referred to the whole experience of being on the dole as “demotivating”. The evidence base in Rhyl provides accounts of people who are motivated initially, subsequently being frustrated by the barriers that they face – for example, wanting to train and/or volunteer for more hours than would be allowed by benefit regulations. One interviewee contended: “JSA kills motivation. What you’re prevented from doing, you just get deeper and deeper in a rut.”

Reference was made above to the issue of job quality and this is also discussed below in the sections on barriers regarding the benefits system and low paid jobs. A lack of jobs that people can see themselves moving into from entry level jobs remains a key challenge in raising the aspirations of some individuals to enter and sustain employment.

4.3 Barriers regarding the benefits system

Barriers posed by the benefits system were identified by employers and residents alike as a key challenge to getting workless people into employment. The ‘16 hour rule’ was identified as a barrier by employers. From an employer perspective the ‘16 hour rule’ can be a disadvantage since workers may be

reluctant to work for more than 16 hours because they need to keep their eligibility to passported benefits. Having the flexibility to increase the number of hours worked was considered important by an employer in the service sector in order to meet fluctuations in demand. It was noted that East European migrants were "keen, flexible and willing to do more hours"; hence the attractiveness of migrant workers to employers. In a discussion with employers it was suggested that if the threshold could be raised from 16 to 20 hours this would be advantageous because it would allow an employer to take on two part-time workers to fill one full-time job.

With regard to people on IB and taking on people with health problems/whose capacity was limited, it does not always make business sense to recruit from this group; as one employer noted: "We're not charities". From an employer perspective it may be "too risky" and "too costly" to recruit such a person - in terms of the risk of someone having to take more time off once in employment (with related expense to the company) and associated expenditure on sick benefit. For example, someone returning to work may be able to work part-time only - and 16 hours may be "no use" to employers in some sectors. Moreover, it was pointed out by employers that it is not necessarily possible to "just create jobs" or "find" alternative work that someone with limited capacity might do due to the nature of the business and associated safety concerns. These employer perspectives underline some of the challenges faced in reducing the number of IB claimants, even if such claimants are "work ready".

From the perspective of workless residents the benefits trap remains a key issue as going into work has to be financially worthwhile. Low pay in work is discussed in more detail below. Aside from wage levels, residents referred to other costs they had to consider in taking up employment, including travel, clothes and equipment, and high childcare costs. The evidence from interviews and focus groups with local residents and organisations provides mixed views about in-work benefits. Some respondents considered that there is a need for greater knowledge about in-work benefits, whereas others appeared adamant that pay levels should be such that in-work benefits are not necessary (as discussed in the following section). Fears about sustaining employment are also an important consideration, on the basis that benefits provide a regular source of income to be set against the fact that a job might not work out and the process of getting back onto benefits might not be straightforward and delays in receipt of benefits could be an issue.

4.4 Low paid jobs

A survey of 71 residents in West Rhyl and South West Rhyl in 2008 uncovered a number of different reasons why it was difficult for unemployed people to get work. A long list of reasons was identified, but "low paid work", alongside "no qualifications/skills" was the most common single reason cited; (other reasons

cited included age, drink, drugs, having a criminal record, responsibilities for children, lack of confidence, lack of references, the complicated nature of the job application process, lack of awareness of expectations of employers and immigrants taking jobs). References by respondents to "rubbish jobs" and "minimum wage jobs", as well as "not enough wages to live on" underline the central importance of pay in decisions about seeking and accepting employment.

Others expressed concerns that to achieve sufficient income from work to make it worthwhile it would be necessary to work such long hours that they would not have enough time to spend with their families. When asked: 'What help do unemployed people need to help them get work?', "decent rates of pay"/"better paid jobs in the Rhyl area" were the second most often cited reasons, after 'better training' /'more specific training'. Other pay-related reasons identified by residents included: "make people better off in work" and "wages should go up, instead of having to rely on top ups". One interviewee contended that a 'living wage' of £7.50 was necessary, rather than a National Minimum Wage pitched at a lower level. Others spoke about needing a 'living wage', without identifying a specific rate.

Low pay may mean, in some circumstances, that an individual is, or perceives himself/herself to be better off on benefits than in work – taking expenses and other considerations into account. On the other hand, the availability of low paid jobs in the local area may enhance the prospects of people who are on benefits gaining employment, on the basis that people already in employment may be unlikely to take such low paid jobs. One of the employers interviewed had adopted such a policy of recruiting new workers from those on benefits to low paid jobs and then promoted from within the company; hence providing the possibility of advancement to employees on the lowest wage levels. For employers adopting such a business model, training in low paid jobs makes commercial sense only if it benefits the person and the company. On business grounds it does not make sense to offer training that does not benefit the company - in the words of one employer: "I do not want to be training people to enable them to take jobs elsewhere." This highlights the challenge of helping residents with poor skills to sustain and progress from low paid employment.

4.5 Transience

Traditionally seaside resorts have been characterised by seasonal employment patterns and transient populations. Typically the housing stock associated with resort functions is such that it is designed to accommodate people on short stays. West Rhyl, in particular, has these characteristics.

The geographical proximity of Liverpool and Manchester means that Rhyl is within relatively easy reach of large urban populations. Some interviewees referred to transient populations, including ex-offenders, from Liverpool and

Manchester seeking cheap accommodation in houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) in Rhyl. It is difficult to get an accurate measure of the size and importance of the transient population in Rhyl. Such accommodation also meets the short-term requirements of migrant workers coming to the UK.

As highlighted above, the nature of the local housing stock is such that the transient population is concentrated particularly in West Rhyl – the ward with the highest level of deprivation in Rhyl. One interviewee cited a report by the Benefits Shop revealing 750 immigrants in West Rhyl and quoted estimates of around 80 per cent of people in West Rhyl coming from outside the area. It was also noted that: “Anyone who does well goes.” Moreover, it seems that many people are transient within West Rhyl: “moving around between different flats in the area.” Also indicative of the transience of the population in Rhyl is the turnover of pupils on school rolls: one interviewee indicated that only 50 per cent of pupils starting secondary school in Rhyl were still there at the end of Year 11 (i.e. age 16).

As noted in the section on contextual and methodological issues in evaluating success, transience has implications for the measurement of 'success' on area-based indicators. If individuals who receive support from City Strategy interventions move away, any 'successes' will not be attributed to an area-based outcome measure. Likewise, if in-migrants are disproportionately non-employed relative to the rest of the local population indicators of disadvantage will be inflated. Moreover, population churn increases the challenge in engaging and maintaining contact with local residents, and of making progress towards employment for those who are most disadvantaged.

However, while the housing stock in West Rhyl is attractive for transient populations, it also lends itself to projects supporting disadvantaged residents with multiple barriers to employment. There have been successful supported housing projects in West Rhyl, designed to provide accommodation and help people to develop skills and stop offending.

Given the transient population, which is in part a function of the way that housing markets operate, it will be challenging for Rhyl City Strategy to measure the impact and success of interventions. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind the implications of a transient population when looking at success in Rhyl vis-à-vis other areas with high levels of worklessness but with contrasting demographic and population flow characteristics.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Addressing challenges

Rhyl City Strategy faces a number of important challenges. Some of these are outlined below, but this list is selective rather than exhaustive.

'Time' always has been and remains an issue – in the short- and longer-term. It takes time to bring about change and observe outcomes. Board members appreciated this. There is also an issue about the time commitment involved in partnership working. As discussed above, some Board members, when reiterating their commitment to Rhyl City Strategy, also highlighted that time was a particular constraint on their involvement, on the basis that: the time for City Strategy was additional to the time devoted to their 'day job'. This is indicative of the ongoing issue of 'capacity', that is ever present for small organisations, in terms of 'stepping up to the mark'. While all individuals and organisations face time pressures, it is important that there is recognition of the fact that these pressures tend to be most stark for smaller organisations and third sector organisations.

Likewise, it was noted that members of the Rhyl City Strategy project team were highly committed and played a central role in success to date. Again, there is a need to be mindful of pressures on project staff over time. More especially, despite their commitment to Rhyl City Strategy, staff members on fixed-term contracts will need to consider their future employment at the end of their current contracts. Departure of members of the staff team would leave a significant 'hole' in City Strategy activity. Given the extension of the City Strategy initiative, a key priority in the short-term is to consider whether and how the employment of the staff team can be extended into the next financial year, or else how these functions of the staff team can be taken forward in future. In the longer-term, it is clear that Board members and partners are clear about the long-term commitment and timescale necessary for tackling worklessness in Rhyl, indicating that a 5-, 10- or 15-year time span would be necessary to make improvements.

As Rhyl City Strategy moves forward it is important to raise the profile of work being undertaken on influencing the delivery of mainstream programmes, alignment of organisational targets and funding streams and seeking funding for new interventions. Specific projects will remain important, not least because they provide a 'tangible' and 'visible' focus of a commitment to address worklessness and raise the profile of employability, but the recognition that Rhyl City Strategy is about much more than specific projects needs to be further embedded.

Engagement of employers and promotion of employer-supported training routeways are key elements of the Rhyl City Strategy approach. The economic

downturn presents additional challenges for advancement on these objectives and there are dangers that any situation of 'events overload' (especially for small employers) and 'initiative overload' could be counterproductive in terms of achieving Rhyl City Strategy objectives. This means that work on streamlining approaches to employers is ever more important.

The changing external economic environment is unlikely to be helpful in challenging the prevailing narrowness of some employers' views about who they will consider taking on, given that with rising unemployment more people with recent work experience are likely to become available, so placing those who are more disadvantaged further down the queue of potential workers. One caveat here, though, is that there is emerging evidence that the UK is becoming a less attractive destination for migrant workers from Eastern Europe and so employers who have relied on migrant workers to fill certain jobs may need to look towards other sources of labour. Likewise the existing negative view amongst some employers about employing people with disabilities and health problems may be more difficult to challenge for the same reason. In the context of rising unemployment, there may be organisational pressures to shift resources away from those who are most disadvantaged in labour market terms towards those who are likely to find employment more quickly and who are less resource-intensive in terms of the help that they need to do so. Furthermore, the economic downturn may reduce the confidence of some individuals about whether they will be able to compete effectively for work.

Although the City Strategy initiative is multifaceted, one means by which 'success' will be measured is by progress towards achieving employment rate and benefit reduction targets. As discussed above, the benefit reduction targets set by the DWP for Rhyl City Strategy are very challenging. In part this reflects the previous trend in benefit levels at the time forecasts were made and targets were set, but the downturn in broader economic fortunes in 2008 compounds this challenge. Furthermore, population transience in parts of Rhyl confounds the measurement of 'success' on area-based outcome indicators. While the benefit reduction targets should not be ignored, it is clear that the 'success' of Rhyl City Strategy needs to be measured in other ways too. Hence, attention needs to be given to finding other ways of recording the 'success' of Rhyl City Strategy interventions and activities. To date there is relatively little hard information on delivery effectiveness.

5.2 Taking advantage of opportunities

The Board members have demonstrated a clear commitment to the core values and objectives of Rhyl City Strategy. They have a shared vision and recognise and value the benefits of partnership working. They are pleased with the progress made to date, through their own endeavours and particularly through the support and hard work of the project team and other partners. They

recognise that this represents only 'early days' in achieving the long-term goals of Rhyl City Strategy. This provides a sound platform for moving forward.

The extension to City Strategy announced in July 2008 means that at this juncture it would be useful to revisit the core objectives of Rhyl City Strategy, how these are being achieved and how and whether current working practices need to be adapted. Likewise, given the extension, the Board may wish to assess the merits of, and scope for, further branding of Rhyl City Strategy to raise the profile of partnership working and employability in Rhyl.

Through the support of the local MP and Assembly Member, and the work and experience of the Project Director in dealing with the DWP, Jobcentre Plus, the Welsh Assembly Government and private sector providers, Rhyl City Strategy has achieved a high profile externally. This means that Rhyl City Strategy is now well positioned to ensure that available mainstream resources are targeted on tackling worklessness in Rhyl and that the particular issues that Rhyl faces are taken into account when services are procured.

At a local level there has been considerable success in reaching out to the community and listening to their concerns and finding out about the barriers that they face in moving towards employment. While this has highlighted the deep-seated nature of issues such as lack of aspiration and stigma for some residents, it has brought to the fore information on residents' perceptions of their own situation and the barriers that they face. This will help in shaping interventions to help tackle worklessness.

The ongoing programme of physical regeneration in Rhyl is a 'visible' reminder to residents and partners of commitment to the future development of Rhyl. Given the profile of such developments, it is important that the social and economic benefits to local people are maximised.

5.3 Recommendations

Some pointers to where future attention might usefully be focused are highlighted above. On the basis of evidence to date, Rhyl City Strategy appears to be doing well. Looking forward, it is important to:

- Maintain momentum by carrying on with current and planned activities, paying particular attention to identifying and recording the 'learning points' from experience to date and applying those lessons elsewhere in Rhyl (e.g. in other projects, for other sub-groups, etc).
- Continue to place increasing emphasis on influencing the delivery of mainstream sources and alignment of targets and funding streams, as well

as exploring the possibilities of using other funding streams to support new interventions.

- Keep working on streamlining and enhancing the effectiveness of employer engagement activity.
- Consider whether there are new ways to raise aspirations and tackle (mis)perceptions about a 'lack of jobs' and 'a lack of possibility for progression in employment' that might usefully be applied in Rhyl.
- Set time aside in order to reflect on what has been achieved to date in the light of the core objectives of Rhyl City Strategy, and whether and how working practices need to be changed.
- Consider the desirability and scope for further branding to raise the profile of Rhyl City Strategy and of employability issues.
- Continue to put pressure on DWP for appropriate enabling measures.
- Give consideration to how 'soft outcomes' can be measured (perhaps in conjunction with other CSPs).
- Consider what might be 'achievable targets' as a precursor to future negotiations with DWP regarding possible changes to targets (especially in the light of the City Strategy extension and the changing economic context).